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ABSTRACT

Since 1975, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC), in Los Angeles, California, has conducted seven studies of liberal arts programs in community colleges. In 1991, CSCC launched the National Liberal Arts Curriculum Project (NLACP), linking findings with an ongoing transfer study at CSCC. Among the areas examined in the NLACP were: the relationship between liberal arts curriculum and an institution's transfer rate; differences in curricular patterns of institutions based on percent of minority enrollment; growth and decline in different curricular areas; the effect of college characteristics on curricular offerings; and the relationship between remedial course enrollments and transfer. From the random sample of institutions contacted in the NLACP, there were 164 participants, representing a 68% response rate. Highlights from the CSCC studies include the following: (1) in the 1991 study, 59,205 liberal arts sections were coded, of which 23.7% were in the humanities and 22.5% were in English, with remedial courses occupying 10% of the total liberal arts curriculum; (2) comparisons of NLACP findings with previous CSCC curriculum studies revealed that liberal arts offerings and enrollments have remained remarkably consistent from 1975 to 1991; (3) in non-liberal arts curricula, agriculture and engineering showed substantial declines between 1978 and 1991; (4) English as a Second Language offerings have increased from 30% of total foreign language offerings in 1983, to 51% in 1991; and (5) Social and Ethnic Studies offerings have shown a marked decline, from 3.1% of total humanities offerings in 1977, to .7% in 1991. Longitudinal data tables of course offerings by subject area are included. (PAA)

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TRACKING THE LIBERAL ARTS OVER SIXTEEN YEARS

Trends and Implications

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TRACKING TRENDS IN THE LIBERAL ARTS OVER SIXTEEN YEARS

Trends and Implications

Introduction

The Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) has tracked community college liberal arts trends in seven studies since 1975. Four different sponsors have funded the studies and not all studies have had the same focus. While only two studies were concerned with the total liberal arts curriculum, other studies focused on specific broad curricular areas and curricular variables, such as faculty goals or student interests or class size. Comparisons across years are possible, although data is not available for all liberal arts areas in all seven studies. This paper presents an overview of the results of the sixteen years encompassed by the studies, with a closer look at two specific areas of recent interest in the latest study, the phenomenal rise of English as a Second Language classes (ESL) and the decline in the number of Social and Ethnic Studies classes offered.

This paper will first present the research questions which drove the 1991 curriculum study and the methodology of that study. The overall results of the 1991 study with comparisons to previous studies since 1975 follows; five tables and graphs illustrate these findings. While this section indicates the

amazing overall stability of the community college liberal arts curriculum, two subject areas experiencing decline are also discussed. The next section deals with two surprising areas of the community college curriculum which do not follow previous trends: ESL and Social and Ethnic Studies courses. And the final section uses the study's findings to address future implications for the community college curriculum and mentions future research areas based upon an extension of the 1991 study in the newly completed 1992 Non-Liberal Arts National Curriculum Study.

Research Questions

Much of the data gathered from the liberal arts curriculum projects prior to 1991 focused upon a segment of liberal arts, such as humanities or fine and performing arts, in relation to some other variables, such as faculty goals or student interests. From its inception, the 1991 National Liberal Arts Curriculum Project was different from previous Curriculum Projects conducted by the CSCC. For the first time a major goal of the study was to link the results of the National Liberal Arts Curriculum Study with another study being conducted by the CSCC--the Transfer Assembly Project.

The Transfer Assembly Project has two major goals: to establish a transfer rate definition and to calculate the percentage of students who transfer from two-year to four-year colleges and universities. Currently in its fourth year, the Transfer Assembly Project has tracked the 1984, 1985, and 1986 cohorts and is presently gathering data on the 1987 cohort of students.

By linking the results of the Transfer Assembly Project to the results of the 1991 Curriculum Project, the following research questions could be addressed:

- What are the relationships between the liberal arts curriculum and an institution's transfer rate?
- Do curricular patterns in colleges with greater than 20% minority enrollment differ from those in colleges with less than 20% minority enrollment?
- Do any curricular patterns emerge in colleges with high transfer rates? For example, are there more advanced English or advanced math classes in colleges with high transfer rates?
- How stable have the liberal arts been over the last sixteen years? Are there any curricular areas of disproportionate growth or reduction?
- Does the size of the college affect which courses it offers? Does the setting--urban, suburban, or rural--affect curricular offerings?
- How do remedial course enrollments relate to transfer or student characteristics?

This paper will address the question of stability in the liberal arts and indicate areas of growth and reduction over the past sixteen years. Several of the other questions will be addressed by other members of this panel presentation.

Methodology

Letters of invitation to participate in the project were sent to Presidents of a random sample of community colleges pulled from the 1991 Directory of the American Association of

Community and Junior Colleges. One hundred and sixty-four colleges agreed to participate, for a total response rate of 68%. The sample was balanced approximately for size categories: 51 small colleges participated (less than 1500 students), 56 medium-sized colleges (between 1500 and 6000 students), and 57 large colleges. Course schedules and college catalogues for Spring session 1991 were requested from each college and courses were then coded according to a liberal arts taxonomy developed by the CSCC since 1975, with only minor changes.[1]

In the taxonomy six major discipline areas form the liberal arts: humanities, English, fine and performing arts, social science, science, and mathematics and computer sciences. These six discipline areas are divided into fifty-five broad subject areas, which are then further divided into 245 sub-subject areas. To illustrate, the "Humanities" discipline area contains the broad subject area "History" which is further divided into "State and local history," "U.S. history," "Western world history," "History of other world regions," "History of special groups," "Social history," and "Other."

Each of the course sections were also coded according to remedial, standard and advanced designations. "Remedial" courses were those which were compensatory or developmental, below college-level proficiency, and for which no transfer credit was awarded. "Standard" courses were any introductory or regular college courses for which a prerequisite was unnecessary. And "Advanced" courses were those which required a prerequisite in

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[1]For example, "Asian Languages" was added as a sub-subject under the broader subject area "Foreign Languages" in the 1991 study.

the same or a related field as a condition for enrollment in the course. One caveat: foreign languages were considered advanced only at the third and fourth years of study.

Certain classes were not coded. Any laboratory, independent study, field study or cooperative education, or apprenticeship classes were not included in the tally of liberal arts course sections. The general rule was that any course without a set time or meeting place could not be coded.

The last part of the data collected were second-census or end-of-the term enrollment figures in order to determine average class size and total enrollment. These were provided by contact persons at each college. After the liberal arts course offerings were tallied, enrollment figures were requested from a random sample of every tenth course under each broad subject area. The number of class sections which were cancelled was also recorded. Figures for average class size and enrollment were then calculated for our study sample of 164 colleges and extrapolated to the universe of 1,250 U.S. community colleges.

Overall Results of the 1991 Study

In the 1991 National Liberal Arts Curriculum Study, 59,205 liberal arts sections were coded. The percent occupied by each of the six major discipline areas is given below:

Table 1: Percentage of Liberal Arts Curriculum by Discipline Area, 1991 (N=164)

Discipline Area	Percent of Liberal Arts
Humanities	23.7%
English	22.5%
Fine and Performing Arts	9.6%
Social Science	11.8%
Science	13.6%
Mathematics and Computer Science	18.9%

Remedial courses occupied 10% of the 1991 total liberal arts curriculum. Of these remedial courses, 69% were English courses and 30% were remedial math courses. Twenty-two percent of the liberal arts curriculum was devoted to advanced classes, which were often offered in the areas of English, foreign languages, music, visual arts, biological sciences, engineering and mathematics.

The data on enrollments revealed larger class sizes in the humanities and social sciences, while fine and performing arts subjects reported among the smallest. The most populated community college subjects remain English and math.

Trends Over Sixteen Years

To determine trends among the liberal arts, the results of the 1991 study must be compared with curriculum studies from previous years. Overall, the liberal arts have remained remarkably stable. In only a few categories do noticeable increases or decreases occur.

All liberal arts subject areas were only tallied in two of the studies conducted by the CSCC--in 1986 and again in 1991.

Other studies describe particular segments of the liberal arts curriculum: the 1977 describes Humanities curricular offerings, the 1978 study concerns Social Science and Science, and the 1987 study centers on the Fine and Performing Arts. The results of all of these studies are provided in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Overall, 57% of the total community college curriculum is devoted to the liberal arts.[2] The CSCC has recently compiled data on the non-liberal arts and begun comparing the findings of this new study to the 1991 National Liberal Arts Study. Table 5 below provides a "sneak preview" of the general findings of these two studies; the line drawn mid-way through the table divides the liberal arts from the non-liberal arts.

Two areas of decline and one area of phenomenal growth in the liberal arts bear comment. First, both agriculture and engineering showed substantial declines between 1978 and 1991. Agriculture dropped from 6% of all science courses in 1978 to .3% of all such courses in 1991. Only 77 courses were coded in agriculture, however, out of 59,205 total liberal arts courses in 1991. This category is an example of a subject taught in few colleges; hence, in national samples of 10 to 15% of the total colleges, sampling error has an exaggerated effect. The figures are simply too small to be reliable.

The drop in Engineering courses was most likely due to two factors: the first concerned the small number of engineering

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[2]Laboratory, apprenticeship, field work, and cooperative education course are more prevalent among the non-liberal arts than the liberal arts course offerings. Since these types of classes were not included in the count for either study, this may partially account for the lower percentage of the total curriculum occupied by the non-liberal arts.

Table 2: Percentage of Total Humanities Class Sections by Subject Area

Discipline	1977 (N = 178)	1983 (N = 173)	1986 (N = 95)	1991 (N = 164)
Cultural anthropology	3.2%	2.1%	2.7%	1.5%
Art history/appreciation	3.8	4.2	5.7	4.2
Foreign languages	20.5	27.7	28.4	35.8
History	23.0	19.9	21.5	19.4
Interdiscip. humanities	7.2	7.3	5.7	6.2
Literature	11.4	11.2	10.0	8.2
Music appreciation	3.3	3.4	4.8	3.5
Philosophy	6.4	6.2	7.8	7.1
Political science	16.6	14.7	13.5	12.6
Religious studies	1.5	1.4	N.A.	.6
Social and ethnic studies	3.1	1.9	N.A.	.7

Table 3: Percentage of Total Classes Offered in the Fine and Performing Arts, 1987 (N=109) and 1991 (N=164)

Subject Area	1987	1991
Visual Arts		
Design	6%	7%
Graphics	6%	6%
Handicrafts	16%	20%
Painting/Drawing	14%	24%
Special Projects	1%	1%
Dance	6%	6%
Music		
Instruments	24%	17%
Theory	9%	7%
Voice	10%	8%
Special Projects	1%	2%
Theater		
Acting/Drama	4%	4%
Production/Directing/ Stagecraft	3%	2%
Special Projects	1%	0.5%

Table 4: Science and Social Science Instruction in the Two-Year Colleges, 1978 (N=175), 1986 (N=95), 1991 (N=164)

Broad Subject Area	Percentage of Colleges Listing Course in Class Schedule			Percentage of All Science Courses Listed in Schedule		
	1978	1986	1991	1978	1986	1991
Agric. and Natural Resources	61	52	16	6	2	.3
Biology	100	98	95	13	11	12
Engineering	81	72	50	20	9	6
Mathematics and Computer Science	99	100	98	22	41	43
Chemistry	97	96	93	8	5	5
Earth and Space	79	72	72	5	2	3
Physics	89	92	87	6	4	4
Physical Anthropology and Inter-disciplinary Social Sciences	67	53	64	3	2	3
Psychology	99	100	98	6	12	12
Economics	99	97	93	4	5	5
Sociology	100	95	94	4	6	7

Table 5: Percentage of Total Curriculum by Major Discipline Areas

Discipline	No. Sections	Percent of Total Curriculum
English	13,327	12.75%
Humanities	14,034	13.42%
Fine and Performing Arts	5,671	5.42%
Social Sciences	6,966	6.66%
Sciences	8,031	7.68%
Math and Computer Sciences	11,176	10.69%
Agriculture (Non-Liberal Arts)	529	0.51%
Business & Office	11,156	10.67%
Marketing	1,523	1.46%
Health	4,641	4.44%
Home Economics	106	0.10%
Technical Education	8,229	7.87%
Engineering Technologies	889	0.85%
Trade & Industry	8,420	8.05%
Personal Skills & Avocational	8,643	8.27%
Education	1,147	1.10%
Other	77	0.07%
Total	104,565	100.00%

Center for the Study of Community Colleges

courses offered in the sample, and the second had to do with an increase in computer-assisted drafting and engineering courses which were often coded under "Computer Science" or under the non-liberal arts "Technical Engineering" category. The second reason, therefore, may have more to do with a "category shift" in the way these courses were coded between the 1978 study and the 1986 and 1991 studies.

While the decline in agriculture and engineering, then, may have more to do with data gathering procedures and taxonomy concerns, real change *did* occur in foreign languages between 1977 and 1991. The tremendous rise in foreign languages is due almost solely to an increase in ESL sections. This particular finding is dealt with in-depth in the following section, along with another area of specific interest--Social and Ethnic Studies.

English as a Second Language

In the 1977 curriculum study ESL was placed under Foreign Languages in the taxonomy. While I would argue that this placement is not appropriate, for comparative purposes we have continued to keep the taxonomy as intact as possible. Therefore, ESL has remained under Foreign Languages in all subsequent CSCC curriculum studies through the most recent 1991 study.

The fact that the Foreign Languages area of the liberal arts curriculum has experienced phenomenal growth between 1975 and 1991 is due solely to ESL. From 1977 to 1991, Foreign Languages grew from 20.5% to 35.8% of the total humanities curriculum, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Foreign Languages as Part of the Total Humanities Curriculum

1977	1983	1986	1991
(N=178)	N=173)	(N=95)	(N=164)
20.5	27.7	28.4	35.8

Further, in the five short years between 1986 and 1991 it grew from 5% to 8.5% as a percentage of the total liberal arts curriculum. This growth in Foreign Languages is based almost completely upon the growth in ESL. ESL jumped from 30% of all Foreign Language sections offered in 1983 to 51% in 1991.

Table 7: ESL as a Percentage of Foreign Languages Sections Offered

1983	1986	1991
30%	43%	51%

The number of community colleges offering ESL (Table 8 below), as well as ESL enrollment as a portion of Foreign Language enrollment also attest to its remarkable growth. In Spring session 1991, enrollment in ESL was an estimated 236,000 out of a total Foreign Language enrollment of 460,000. ESL, then, accounted for over half of all Foreign Language enrollment.[3]

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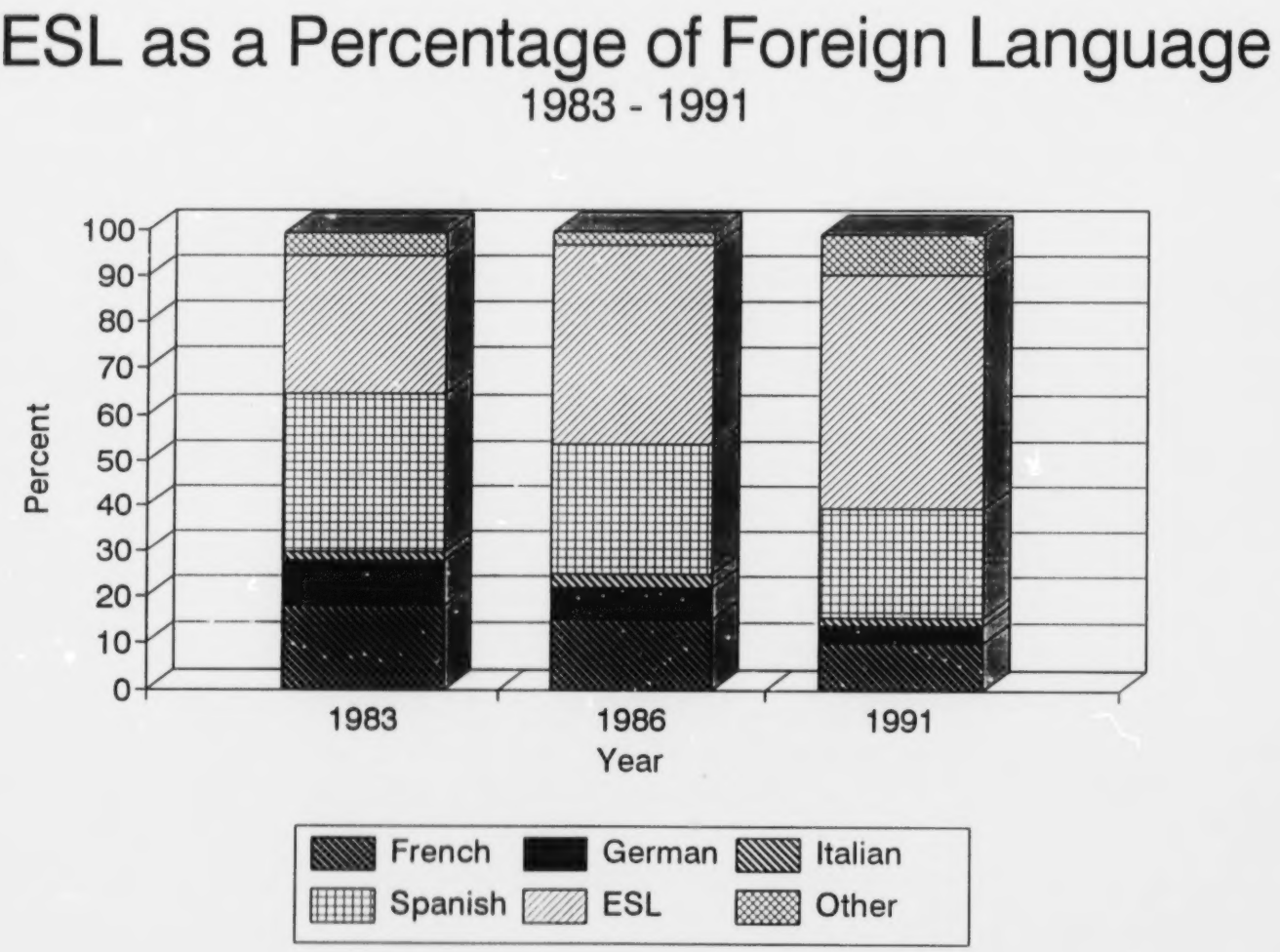
[3] Enrollment data was calculated using the following method:
Total enrollment in U.S. community colleges: 5,105,353
Total enrollment in the 164 colleges in the sample: 997,080
Percent of the total that is in the sample 19.5%
Multiplier of 19.5% sample percentage to equal 100% 5.13
The percentage of cancelled classes and the average class size in each broad subject area was used in a formula to compute the total enrollments shown.

Table 8: Percentage of Community Colleges Offering ESL during Spring Term in Each Year

1975	1977	1983	1986	1991
26%	33%	27%	38%	40%

The column graph below illustrates the change in ESL over just an eight year span, growing from 30% of the 1983 Foreign Language curriculum to 51% in 1991:



One caveat is in order in considering the startling growth in ESL: the phenomenon is largely urban. Only 5 out of 51 small colleges offered any ESL classes, while only 12 out of 56 medium-sized colleges offered ESL. Forty-nine out of 57 large colleges, however, offered at least one ESL class, with many large colleges offering substantial numbers of ESL sections. El Paso Community College offered 429 ESL sections in the spring of 1991; its nearest "competitor" was Harry S. Truman College in Illinois, with 243 sections of ESL. The correlation coefficient between ESL and size of college is .3287, where *p* is significant at the .01 level for a one-tailed test of significance. The list of community colleges below with large numbers of ESL sections illustrates the urban nature of this "ESL phenomenon:"

Table 9: Large ESL Programs

Community College	No. of Sections ESL
Yuba College (CA)	70
Pasadena City (CA)	71
Community College of Philadelphia (PA)	83
San Jose City (CA)	89
Miami-Dade (South Campus) (FL)	152
Passaic County (NJ)	160
Harry S. Truman (IL)	243
El Paso (TX)	429

If, as expected, ESL continues its growth in community colleges, the impact is likely to be especially strong in large, urban colleges.

Social and Ethnic Studies

Another area of the curriculum from the 1991 curriculum study which experienced surprising change was Social and Ethnic Studies. This area declined steeply between 1975 and 1991.

The percentage of colleges offering any social and ethnic studies courses fell 7.4% between 1975 and 1991, as shown in Table 10, as did its percentage of all humanities courses offered (Table 11). In an age where multicultural studies are ever more

Table 10: Percentages of Community Colleges Offering Social & Ethnic Studies Spring Term in Each Year

1975	1977	1983	1991
22%	21%	10%	14.6%

Table 11: Social and Ethnic Studies as a Percentage of Humanities Sections

1977 (N=178)	1983 (N=173)	1991 (N=164)
3.1%	1.9%	.7%

popular, why did this drop occur? One explanation concerns the way in which Social and Ethnic Studies courses were coded under the taxonomy used in the National Liberal Arts Study.

In many community colleges, Social and Ethnic Studies courses do not fall within bona fide Social and Ethnic Studies *Departments*. Rather, these courses are scattered throughout the curriculum in such departments as Art History or Appreciation, Anthropology and Cultural Anthropology, History, Literature, Sociology and Interdisciplinary Sociology. In the 1991 curriculum study, a course on Afro-American Authors was coded under "Literature: Group" rather than under Social and Ethnic Studies. The emphasis in a course concerned with the work of black American writers often focused on literary style and genre as much as on content. These courses were therefore coded under

Literature. A course had to be more interdisciplinary in nature to be coded under Social and Ethnic Studies. The reported decline in Social and Ethnic Studies courses might well not have occurred at all if courses subsumed under other departments had been included in the count for Social and Ethnic Studies. It may be that there are just as many Social and Ethnic Studies courses in 1991 as there were in 1975; the difference may lie in the fact that Social and Ethnic Studies courses are now more often found in other departments.

Implications and Future Research

What do the results of the curriculum study portend for community colleges? What, if any, changes in the curriculum are in evidence from this study? The results, overall, are reassuring if one is concerned about the place of the liberal arts in community colleges. Overall, the liberal arts are stable, and, with the few exceptions noted above, have remained remarkably consistent over a sixteen year span. The expanding use of computers in curricula between 1975 and 1991 does indicate some change, most noticeably in areas like "Visual Arts" where computerized design techniques have a solid impact on the area of "graphic arts." The growth of ESL could also indicate change, especially for large urban community colleges. In general, however, much remains the same.

For the first time, the CSCC has also tallied course sections in the non-liberal arts, according to a taxonomy based largely upon that used by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education (NCRVE) at Berkeley. The results of that

study have just been compiled and data is beginning to be linked between this most recent project with the Transfer and Liberal Arts projects. General questions such as what proportion of the total community college curriculum is devoted to the liberal arts and what proportion is held by the non-liberal arts have already been answered (57/43, respectively). Questions such as whether or not career transfer shows a consistent relationship with student transfer rates or proportion of minority student enrollment are currently being addressed.

Extending the work of past curriculum studies into the area of the non-liberal arts will round out our knowledge of the total community college curriculum. Linking these studies together with the Transfer Assembly Project will hopefully provide clarification concerning the degree of opportunity--both educational and social--afforded community college students in either liberal arts or non-liberal arts degree programs.